GAMBLING WITH FATE

By WILLIAM WALLACE COOK Author of "The Gold Gleaners: A Story of the Cytolide Tanks," "Wilby's Deal, "His Friend its Streety," "Repers of Ruting," Son, Roc.

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Junius, for God knows how much those unfortunate spells, over which you have no control, her haped in your undoing. It is not so hard to live down the past. Other men have done worse and have cetrieved themselves. Simply renounce all intercourse with this man who has been your ruin. That is the first and most important step. Then, if there is anything holy for you on earth or above it, swear by that never to stake another dollar at play. *

You say this man has a strange influence over you—a weird and mailign power which you cannot fight against—and that it is impossible for you to keep

You say this man has a strange influence over you—a weird and malign power which you cannot fight againstand that it is impossible for you to keep away from him. Nonsense! Brace up, my boy, and be a man. If you cannot do this for yourself, do it for the sake of your family, for love of the girl who is to link her fate with yours. If all these influences are powerless to sway you, then certainly you must go your own course and forfelt the esteem of all who know you, including that of your friend, LORRY.

"Unfortunate spells." The words rang in Darrel's brain. A clew to their meaning was found in a brief letter bearing, in its upper, left-hand corner, the card of a New York physician.

You question me as to the cause and eventual result of those recurring conditions you find it so difficult to understand. The phenomena are sensory. Nerves are like harp-strings; played upon too freely by an excitement so intense as you develop, they grow suddenly mute, the melody of life dying out of them. Again and again the music will come creeping back, then finally fail to return from these mysterious regions whence all life comes and whither, at the last, it files for all time.

This is your knowledge and your warn-

This is your knowledge and your warning, and if I write in unprofessional terms, I am yet sure that you will understand. Save yourself while there is time!

The haunting phrases of this letter appealed to Darrel. He had a soul for poetry and had occasionally set his hand to verse.

Although he read and re-read the written words for the mere pleasure they gave him, as a clew to the "unfortunate spells" they remained only a clew and nothing more.

Among the other missives were two from a sweetheart. The heart of a woman, laid bare in the opening words of the first letter, gave Darrel pause.

His own heart smote him for prying thus into the very core of McCloud's privacy. Yet had he not the right?

That revolver proved a connection with Murgatroyd, and Murgatroyd, to Darrel's mind, stood all but convicted of the murder of Sturgls. The fugitive read on.

The first letter was all that a lover might expect from his betrothed, but the second throbbed in every line with bitter anguish, broke the golden chain of love and released him from his yows.

For all that the letters revealed bearing upon Darrel's affairs they might have been left unprofaned by stranger eyes. A sickening horror pulsed through the fugitive's veins and he hastened his reading.

At the very last was this, from Ormster:

* * * I have taken the liberty to refer to you under a communication of even date berewith, a Miss Elais Avery and her must. Mrs. Gerton. They will arrive soon in Amsonda on a peculiar mission. Any aid you may render Miss Avery and Mrs. Gerton will be gratefully received by them and decay appreciated by me. Whatever you do in their behalf will serve to lift your mind and withdraw it from your own mistortunes.

Darrel wringled his brow over this epistic. It was need an unknown quantity which might play have with his producted equation.

Every other serep of information gleaned from the correspondence proved favorable to the fugitive's plan. This iast letter of Ormsby's alone made him healtate.

Half an hour's reflection, however decided the matter. It was a leap in the dark, but he would take it.

CHAPTER IX.

DARREL'S LEAP IN THE DARK.

With a pair of scissors taken from the sole-leather toilet-case Darrel cut off his full beard. Then he went down to the creek and brought back some water in a collapsible cup of the sort affected by traveless who have an aversion for public drinking utensils.

In a small shaving mug, lettered "J. McC." in gilt monogram, he stirred up a lather with perfumed soap and silvermounted brush. The razor had an ivory handle and the hollow-ground blade of rare and tempered steel threw off the candle light brilliantly as he drew it back and forth over the strop—the gold- mounted strop of a sybarite.

Presently Darrel's white face was as smooth and clean as a child's and he studied it in the mirror and compared it line by line with the delicate features of the man in the bunk. There was a striking resemblance.

Who says that fate does not favor the bold? Or that a man's fortunes are ever at so low an ebb she does not blow a straw of hope across his path?

Darrel was more than satisfied. A swim in the creek and a brisk rub with

WITH BUT KING OF & COME TOWN

a rough towel sent the blood tinging through his bruised and weary limbs. Already he was a different man. But

the transformation was not yet complete.

Neatly laundered linen and fresh silken undergarments were among the stores of the old traveling bag. He dressed himself slowly and deliberately, by and by standing forth in the dead man's shoes and corduroys, appareled completely from head to heel. In the pockets of the garments he found many things. A silver cigar-clipper, a cigar case, a seal purse containing \$500 in bills, a card case, a key ring, a pen-knife and a magnificent gold watch, fob and seal.

His mud-splashed, brier-torn garments he left on the chair in lieu of the corduroys, disturbing nothing that had been his own. Reckoned dollar for dollar he was leaving twice the amount in valuables that he was tak-

"In stepping from one life into another," he said to himself, "there must be a fair exchange. But this is better than fair. I leave with him more personal property than I appropriate and a better reputation than he has to give. I am an innocent man believed to be guilty, while he is guilty, but supposed to be innocent. His innocence must shield me while I work out my own salvation."

Standing beside the bunk, Darrel gave the calm face and stony, staring eyes a long farewell look. McCloud was a young man to have "stepped aside" so early in the game of life.

He had come west to live down misdeeds of the east. There was nothing strange in that, for many a man had done likewise.

But he had relatives, near ones and dear friends, a sweetheart—wealth, no doubt. Darrel sighed and closed the lids over the staring eyes. He longed to cover the young face, with its evidence of suffering, but he dared do no more.

Circumstances had placed Darrel in his present unpleasant plight. From now on he must pay due regard to circumstances and at all times consider them well.

Moodily he paced the confines of the hut, the figurative terms of the doctor's letter running through his brain. Gradually his face grew rapt and ecstatic.

He could add something to the tragic circumstances under which the body would be found. In a moment he had dropped down at the table.

Tearing a yellow scrap from the paper bag that had contained the luncheon, he fumbled through the unaccustomed pockets until he had found a pencil.

Then he wrote:

Flight of star, or shivering beam Falling athwart the storm-cloud's wrack,

wrack,
Follow and find is it truth or dream,
Lamp of the gods or a glow-worm's
track.

N. D. He was not a poet—he could not lay that flattering unction to his soul. A poet is not a man who feels but a man who can write what all men feel.

This quatrain was as near as Darrel could come to analyzing, in words, the emotions of the moment. McCloud had gone into the unknown of death while this other fugitive was steering towards the unknown in life.

Over the head of the bunk Darrel left his verse, impaling it on a sliver of wood. Then he packed McCloud's belongings in the traveling bag and started from the hut. At the door he paused and turned, his eyes on the still form in the bunk.

"I leave you here, Nathan Darrel," he said, "an innocent, well- meaning man who fared ill at the hands of others and who tried to be honest but could not be honorable. Now let us see how well Junius McCloud retrieves himself,"

Half an hour later he was riding through the gray dawn, mounted on the calico cayuse and with the old traveling bag fast at the saddle-can-

CHAPTER X.

DARREL AGAIN AT THE HALF WAY HOUSE,

Darrel tarried for breakfast at the Half Way house. Here he had the first opportunity of testing the effectiveness of his disguise.

The shrinking personality of the man in corduroys was well assumed. In dismounting at the stable, Jimmie, the hostler, wished him a brusque "howdy," then averted his face, winked at a friend standing near by and thrust his tongue in his cheek.

Dislike was written large in the proprietor's face when Darrel entered the office. Darrel gave small heed to this and dropped into a chair with his eyes on a second man who happened to be in the room at that moment.

This man was none other than the youth whose money Darrel had saved at Hawkbill's and who had so well repaid the debt. The young man's keen glance swept the fugitive then turned away without the slightest sign of recognition.

"The sheriff went up War Eagle way last night," said the proprietor, resuming his conversation with the young man.

"With the intention of investigating the explosion?"

"I reckon that's it. He wants to make out whether the Sandy Bar chaps told the facts or jest runs in a ver-

sion of the 'Rabian Nights onto him."
"I've been up the trail and looked over the ground and there can't be the slightest doubt of what happened."
There was an undertone of regret and

sadness in the young man's voice.
"Here's the p'int," returned the proprietor, argumentatively. "Is it possible to snake a man off'n the earth
in that a-way?"

"Five nundred pounds of dyna-

"I know about that. There ain't no question in my mind but that that much giant powder 'u'd lay out a rigiment, but here: would it wipe out the remains of a rigiment, or of even one man? It don't seem sensible, not ter

"There wasn't a trace of the wagon left; and if the wagon was sponged out so effectually why not Darrel?" It was the same argument used by

Cliff and it was unanswerable.

"Well," was the dogged answer, "I'll allers have my doubts, anyways. One thing's sure: Uncle Ab was in luck ter git jounced out'n the wagon before the blow-up, an' the team was in luck ter break away from the wagon an' git out o' range. The sheriff is comia' back this afternoon an' then maybe we'll know more. Wonder who gets Murgatroyd's thousand dollars?"

"It isn't likely that any one will get

"Hardly, that's a fact. It was quick action, don't ye think?" The proprietor laughed jestingly. "The Sandy Bar boys were saved a bad job that might have looked ugly for them before they got through."

"They'd have lynched Darrel if they had caught him."

"Wouldn't they, though? They'd have hung him higher'n Haman an', 'tween you an' me, it would have been good enough fer 'im."

"That's where you're wrong," said the youth, warmly; "no mob ever yet had a moral right to lynch a man—" "Oh. shucks!"

"And if the Sandy Bar boys had been able to carry out their lawless designs they'd have hung a man whose guilt had yet to be proved."

"You're plum crazy!" declared the proprietor. Where the discussion would have

led the two is problematical. Just then the Chinaman walked through the office with his song. "Breakfus' leddy." he announced,

"Breakfus' leddy," he announced, and began hammering out the alarm in front of the door.

When Darrel sat down at the table the proprietor posted himself at the dining-room entrance and watched him



IN THE AFTERNOON HE READ AN ACCOUNT OF HIS DEATH IN A DAILY PAPER.

ominously. The fugitive's identity was not suspected, but the proprietor had heard of the extra plate-cleaning the day before and wanted to see if the insult would be repeated.

It was not. Darrel made a half-movement to take the plate from the table, but dropped it again after a quick giance at the man in the doorway.

The food was brought on, Darrel began to eat and the proprietor went away with a grim smile. Breakfast over, Darrel asked for a sheet of paper and an envelope.

In a few moments he had written the following:

"For the Sheriff: If you will call at the old cabin in the coulee to the left of the War Eagle trail, not far from the mine, you will find something that will interest you."

He did not sign the communication, but put it into the envelope, sealed it and addressed it to "The Sheriff, on his way back to Anaconda," and left it with the proprietor for delivery.

When he rode away from the tavern Darrel was reassured. His new personality had withstood the test and he knew that he could trust it until such time as it ceased to be serviceable.

But one thing made him uneasy. That was the doubt, now twice expressed, that giant powder could be so comprehensive in its destructive powers.

To settle his question what could be better than to have the sheriff visit the hut in the coulee? The body of a smooth-faced man would be found, but evidences would be at hand to

show that a beard had been removed.

Everything would point to a sudden

Everything would point to a sudden act of self-destruction. It would be supposed that Nate Darrel, overcome with the hopelessness of his case, had done away with himself.

The fact that the fugitive had escaped the explosion in some remarkable way would silence the doubters.

Shortly before noon Darrel rode into Anaconda, turning aside and making for the livery barn nearest the Blackfoot trail. The hostler came grinning out to receive the horse.

"The calico carried you all right, eh?" the man inquired.

"Very well indeed. How much do

I owe you for him?"
The hostler stared.

"Why," he answered, "you bought him from the old man. Don't want to pay for the brute twice, do you?" Darrel was quick to take care of the emergency.

"I mean for his keep," he answcred, with a shade of annoyance. "Will you keep him here for nothing?"

"You'll have to see the old man about that. He's gone home to dinner now"

Darrel untied the traveling-bag from the cantle and walked down the street. He passed the "Colonel's Own," silent and almost deserted, at that hour, and was soon at the hotel where he had put up during his brief stay in town a short time before.

"How do you do, Mr. McCloud," said the clerk, affably. "You're a little ahead of schedule, aren't you?"

"A little."
"I understood you to say you wouldn't be back until to-morrow.

Two ladies called to see you, this morning, and left a card."

Darrel took the card as the clerk handed it over. "Mrs. Marian Gorton," ran the printed text, and underneath was written, in pencil: "and

Miss Elise Avery."

"Did they leave any word?" asked
Darrel, quietly.

"Said they'd call to-morrow afternoon—I told them you'd be back then." This dilemma had been anticipated

and Darrel knew it was not to be shirked. It was the one point of weakness in his new armor.

"We've kent your old room for your."

"We've kept your old room for you," went on the clerk. "I'll have the boy take up your satchel."

The boy was called and took possession of the traveling-bag. The clerk handed him a key and then Darrel followed him up stairs.

CHAPTER XL

DARREL FACES THE ISSUE.

There was a sole-leather trunk in McCloud's room. At was locked but a small key ring in a pocket of the corduroys held a key that gave access to it.

No papers were found. There were two suits of clothes—both of the best quality—a supply of clean linen, cravats and other things usually found in a gentleman's wardrobe.

Darriel closed the trunk disappointedly and carried his search through the closet and dresser drawers. There was nothing there, all McCloud's belongings, apart from what he had taken with him in the traveling-bag, having been put away in the trunk.

The eastener had told the clerk he intended to return on the morrow, but it was perfectly evident that he had imagined he might be detained much longer. Had he left Anaconda with the deliberate intention of destroying himself?

When he went down stairs to dinner Darrel was revolving this question in his mind. In the afternoon he read an account of his death in a daily paper and gave diligent attention to the gruesome details.

It was a long article and began with an account of the murder of Sturgis, the arrest of Darrel and his night escape from the Sandy Bar jail. Then followed a summing up of all the known facts connected with the explosion on the War Eagle trail.

Nothing new was brought forward but the author of the account was not a doubter for he dwelt exhaustively on the vicarious methods of justice and pointed the whole affair with a moral. Next morning another paper had

Next morning another paper had more to say on the subject. Sheriff Scatterly had returned from the hills after a personal investigation and gave it as his opinion that the escaped murderer had been hurled into eternity in substantially the manner described by the men from Sandy Bar.

Abner Gryce's bronchos had run away; the wagon had collided with a boulder beside the trail, the horses had broken loose and the shock of the collision had set off the crystalized giant powder. That explained the arrival of the run-away team, practically uninjured, at the War Eagle mine.

Abner Gryce had been thrown from the wagon when it took the turn, but the murderer had stayed with it. Consequently there was but one inference to be drawn.

Thus far Darrel read with amused indifference. The paragraphs that followed, however, startled him and filled him with consternation.

The report went on to state that Scatterly, in returning from the War Eagle mine, had had a communication handed to him at the Half Way house. Usually he took no notice of anonymous letters, but in this particular case he had made an exception.

(To be continued.)

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